

## Identification of some learning strategies through the composition of texts in English

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**Abstract.** This article shows the results of an investigation about the learning strategies used and reported by first semester students while writing different texts in the BA in English at Universidad del Tolima, semester B of 2009. The main aim is presenting the learning strategies that were caught by the evaluators through the assessment of the compositions.

Two groups of students were the population under study. The aim of the research was to examine the strategies used and reported by the students while writing. Three experts were asked to conduct the students' samples evaluations. This exercise contributed to the inquiry of the strategies and also yielded results that are useful for teachers to improve the process of writing in the English learners. The methodology of this study included the video-observation of three writing practice sessions, collection of writings produced by the students and their evaluation. The results presented here showed that students do not always use the strategies they reported. For instance: concept maps, peer corrections, look for information in different sources, etc.

**Key words:** Learning strategies, external evaluator, writing process, assessment, rubric.

**Resumen.** En este artículo se muestra parte de los resultados de la investigación sobre las estrategias de aprendizaje que los estudiantes de primer semestre de Inglés I, semestre B de 2009, emplearon en sus escritos. El objetivo central del artículo es presentar las ideas que captaron las evaluadoras a través de la revisión y evaluación de las composiciones escritas.

La población de este estudio fue dos grupos de estudiantes de Inglés I de la Licenciatura en inglés de la Universidad del Tolima. El objetivo era indagar acerca de las estrategias utilizadas y reportadas por los estudiantes en el proceso de escritura.

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Tres expertas en escritura en inglés, diferentes de las investigadoras, se encargaron de la lectura y posterior evaluación de los escritos de los estudiantes. Este ejercicio contribuyó a la investigación de las estrategias y arrojó resultados útiles para los profesores de inglés y para así mejorar el proceso de escritura de los estudiantes de inglés. La metodología de este estudio consistió en video-observación de tres sesiones de práctica de escritura, la recolección de los escritos producidos por los alumnos y su evaluación. El resultado presentado aquí muestra que algunas veces no hay coherencia entre lo que se dice y se hace, toda vez que los estudiantes estudiados no siempre utilizan las estrategias a las que se refieren. Por ejemplo: mapas conceptuales, corrección del compañero, buscar información sobre el tema de escritura en diferentes fuentes, etc.

**Palabras clave:** Estrategias de aprendizaje, evaluador externo, proceso de escritura, valoración, rúbrica

## **Introduction**

A lot of different research about learning strategies has been studied by professionals from diverse fields, for instance: Monereo, Mattox, among others, in an attempt to analyze/improve the learning and teaching process in the acquisition of a foreign/second language. This article focuses especially on presenting the results that were analyzed by evaluators, in order to identify what learning strategies were really used by students during the writing process and what strategies need to be strengthened. The evaluators' ideas were very significant not only because they showed that students are more declarative than procedural, but also because they provide suggestions about different strategies such as brainstorming, mind map, semantic network and peer correction among others, which could help their students improve their writing. The suggestions included by the evaluators have to do with the methodology to use the strategies in and out of class, the persistence and the motivation to use some strategies the students do not use in their writing, and the freedom the students should feel in choosing the topics when they approach the writing process.

## **Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies have been studied by different authors, and the results of the investigations have offered valuable information to improve learning a second/foreign language. It is important to highlight that to define learning strategies is not an easy task, because there are many words used to explain them, for instance: skills, capacities, tools, techniques or methods. This aspect has been part of a heated debate.

Weinstein and Mayer (1987: 19) consider LS (Learning Strategies) as techniques or devices, which learners use to learn and regulate their learning. Cohen (1998: 4) says that LS are processes that are conscious; he states: "Strategies can be defined

as those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a... language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about language”. Another idea is that LS are attempts to promote some competences in the Target language; in this sense, Tarone (1981) points out: “Learning Strategies are attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language”. Moreover, in this study, Oxford’s definition was especially relevant since she integrates cognitive and emotional aspects, among others; about LS, Oxford (1990:8) asserts: “LS are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations”. The above definitions are remarkable because these give teachers elements that can support the learning process.

### **Learning Strategies Taxonomy**

One relevant aspect to mention is the taxonomy of Learning Strategies that some authors present in their studies; for instance: Cohen (1996:2) considers that are retrieval, rehearsal, cover and communicative strategies. He affirms:

Second language learner strategies encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies. Taken together, they constitute the steps or actions selected by learners either to improve the *learning* of a second language, the *use* of it, or both. Language use strategies actually include retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies, and communication strategies. What makes the definition for language learning and language use strategies broad is that it encompasses those actions that are clearly aimed at language learning, as well as those that may well lead to learning but which do not ostensibly have learning as their primary goal.

On the other hand, Oxford makes reference to an especial classification of LS. She presents direct strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social). Related to Memory strategies, which allow recalling words, structures or dates, Oxford (1990: 38) states: Memory strategies are: “for remembering and retrieving new information”. About compensation strategies, which help to reduce the gaps when learners are communicating ideas, Oxford (1990: 47) argues that: “Compensation strategies enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge”.

Moreover, O’Malley and Chamot, in their studies, give a valuable contribution to enlarge the concepts about cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies require the interaction with material, repeating, analyzing and summarizing. O’Malley and Chamot (1990: 99) claim: “Cognitive strategies are exemplified by inferring or guessing meaning from context, and elaborating or relating new information to other concepts in memory”. About Metacognitive strategies, which are related to

the learning process itself, O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 99) assert: "These involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task, and evaluating how well one has learned".

The categorization aforementioned provides complete information about some issues that need to be considered to improve, not only (in) the written competence, but also (in) the learning process.

### **Some significant concepts about writing**

Writing is not an easy exercise. It implies the production of ideas that need to be understood by others, and then writing is not just putting letters and consonants together to form sentences or ideas. Cassany (1996: 13) considers that: "escribir significa mucho más que conocer el abecedario, saber "juntar letras" o firmar el documento de identidad. Quiere decir ser capaz de expresar información de forma coherente y correcta para que la entiendan otras personas". The process of writing, as Cassany says, is not easy; it demands not only knowledge about the grammar, but also about the topic in question, and a good motivation to write.

It is significant to say that writing is a productive skill that requires some elements to get a coherent and cohesive final product; for instance: clear purpose, audience, proof reading and revision. White and Arndt (1991: 5) state: "Writing is an activity that requires time and revision, as well as, a purpose and audience to make the activity real - life like. But apart from this, writing is a skill that demands constant feedback that permits students to learn from their errors, so that they can improve their learning style". Furthermore, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, message organization among others are very significant in the writing process; Chakraverty and Gautum (2002: 22) claim: "Writing, an important part of learning, is essentially a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyze and classify any background knowledge. Then writers need suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of a coherent discourse".

There are different aims to write; for instance: for a special purpose, to give an answer, to accomplish a special academic task or to write only because it is a hobby. For this study, the pupils were involved in writing for writing, that is to say write about what they like, following some instructions. It was expected that students made a draft, reviewed and edited their piece of writing; about this, Harmer (2009: 113) assumes: "when students are writing-for-writing, we will want to involve them in the process of writing. In the 'real world', this typically involves planning what we are going to write, drafting, reviewing and editing what we have written and then producing a final (and satisfactory) version".

On the other hand, correction and revision processes were done keeping in mind that there is a difference between the words. The first one is simple, so it is more

closed to place the errors, whereas the second one requires more time and allows identifying weaknesses that affect the meaning of the text; Sánchez (nd: 4) considers:

La corrección como una fase de beneficios de “corto alcance” en la que se buscan errores visibles y se ejecuta en la inmediatez de la escritura; y la revisión, como fase de “largo alcance” en la que se analiza la concepción global del texto para tomar decisiones y se pone en juego un diálogo comunicativo entre el autor y un tercero, que puede ser el profesor, otro estudiante o hasta el propio autor desde una posición de “descentramiento”. (p. 4).

## **1. Population**

The two groups from the 1<sup>st</sup> semester were made up of 33 students, 18 in the first group and 15 in the second. The age range was from 16 to 22. Some students were from other municipalities and some from the capital, Ibagué. They came from public and private schools. The two groups of students had heterogeneous English level; most of them had elementary level; however, there were a small percentage of students with high level. These aspects were evident not only in the final product, but also during the classes that were observed and recorded.

## **2. Hypothesis**

During the research about learning strategies reported and used by first semester students for texts composition in the BA in English, the hypothesis was: What kind of information can result from a written assessment in order to improve the use of strategies for the development of texts composition in English?

## **3. Description of the assignment**

One aspect that is worth mentioning is the way in which the topics for writing compositions were selected. The students were asked to suggest issues to write on. The teachers wrote the suggested topics on the board and the students had to choose ten possible ideas for the assignment. Then, during each session, the pupils were asked to select the topic from the previous list, in order to do the assignment. There were six sessions, three for each group.

Once the topic was selected, the teachers from both groups gave the general instructions to write the composition, and at the beginning of each class in which the project was developed, the students were told to be attentive to directions. It is important to point out that the teachers were supporting students when necessary.

Something interesting to mention is that one of the three written sessions was done in a special room called ‘the Bilingualism room’, which is equipped with computers and Internet. The students had the opportunity to use Internet in order

to use dictionaries, or to look up information related with the topic. The other two sessions were developed in the classroom without the help of computers.

#### **4. Data collection instruments**

The instruments that were needed to carry out the research were: Students' composition texts, which were collected at the end of each session. As mentioned above, three different compositions were written by students, taking into consideration the instructions given by the professor in charge of the course during each session.

The evaluation and production of the students' written compositions has been studied from different perspectives, methods and purposes. In this study, the focus was to identify the strategies the students used in their written activity. The piece of written text demanded during the observation of the classes should fulfill some requirements of an argumentative text. The text should have also the characteristics of being coherent, understandable and cohesive. For that reason, a series of parameters were designed to be kept in mind at the time to be scored by the evaluators in writing.

With respect to the indicators to evaluate the compositions, different rubrics offered by Van Dijk, Cassany, and others were studied. The model offered on a doctoral thesis, whose author is Belkis Cárdenas, was adapted and the first draft of this was shared with the evaluators who were asked to give suggestion in order to improve it. The rubric was checked and reorganized once evaluators' feedback was received. The final version (Appendix 1) was sent to the professors who evaluated the students' compositions. Therefore, the aspects that were evaluated were: task fulfillment, message organization, vocabulary, use of morphosyntactic structure in the language, format, punctuation, spelling and readability.

Another instrument used was a questionnaire for the evaluator. Keeping in mind the studies about learning strategies and writing process, some questions were thought for the evaluators to find the possible answer to the hypothesis. They were inquired about: first, strategies used by students according to their own assessment; second, if the use of strategy has been helpful for students; third, they were asked about some strategies that could be helpful for students which they did not use during the writing process. From the results obtained by students in the writing of the texts, it could be said that there is a relationship between the use/non-use of learning strategies, and achievement or difficulty of students in the outcome of their writing process (Appendix 2).

#### **5. Results**

As it was said above, the written compositions were assessed using the rubric that was built in collaborative form, by researchers and evaluators. The presentation of results is developed keeping in mind the answers provided by the evaluators, after

revising the students' texts. The three evaluators in this study are reported with the initial letters of their names in capital letters: CL, JA and ALM, and the results are reported in this way.

With regard to the first question: *Strategies used by students according to evaluators' assessment*, the teachers who revised the texts could conclude that the strategies that were evident during the three sessions were: Memory Strategies. Students tended to use the information they had in their memory, recalling data, and some processes such as the knowledge they had about the world and the knowledge they had about English. About it, CL says: "What I saw about the students' writings, I can say that there is clear evidence of *memory strategies*, as well as a clear association of prior knowledge to their daily lives, whatever that is". Another strategy used by some students was cognitive. The students showed in their writing that they knew how to do things, in this case how to write and over all they knew about the topic of the task. It seems that the students enjoy the topic, and it should be, because they know what and how to write about it. It also shows the cognitive processes that the students follow in the development of the tasks. Regarding to this, CL considers that: "especially in the first group, it is recognized the application of **cognitive strategies**. Then, especially in the first text, there is a standard model of writings, that is to say, the writings are rather uniform. Unlike the case with the texts of the other group, the style was more heterogeneous and it seems like this was more spontaneous, more from students' common sense".

Related to the same question, JA estimates: 'that, according to the reading from the task done by students, the most frequent strategies are those that deal definitively with *direct compensation strategies* to alter or adjust native language words in order to compensate or remedy their deficiencies related to vocabulary.' Other strategies that the teacher could identify were Memory strategies; JA recognizes: '*Memory strategies* were also evident, so that students resort to their experiences in order to retrieve information and concepts that will support the argument of ideas'.

*Translation*, as a strategy, is used specially at the beginning of the process of learning a foreign language. In this case, students tend to think and organize the ideas in their mind using their native language, and then they wrote their ideas using the Spanish structures. ALM states: "I noticed that some students *used direct compensation strategies* by using 'creative' language, modifying and inventing words in order to make the message understandable. It is also clear that many of them followed the pattern of Spanish grammar to write their texts, which demonstrates the use of translation as a strategy. Additionally, each student related the task assigned topic in scriptural with its particular context and political, religious, ethical and social, among others".

Furthermore, it is crystal-clear that students use the strategies according to the task that they need to do. Paraphrasing O'Malley and Chamot (1985), there are some

strategies which are used by students; for instance: repetition and memorization. About Cognitive Strategies, these strategies are used by students in the first levels, especially repetition, translation and transfer too. Related to compensation strategies, Oxford (1990: 48) considers: ‘Compensation strategies allow learners to produce spoken or written expressions in the new language without complete knowledge’. Moreover, compensation strategies let the learners to use different tools in order to transmit the message; Oxford (1990: 48) asserts: ‘However, other compensation strategies – adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, using a circumlocution or synonym, or selecting the topic – can be used in informal writings as well as in speaking’.

Now, with regards to the second question, *do you consider the use of strategies has been helpful for students?*, it is valuable to say that the three evaluators agreed that the use of strategies were very significant for students in order to do the written exercises; there are the teachers’ conclusions about this question. CL deems that, ‘in the first group it could be said that students indeed used various strategies and this helped a lot in their writing process. However, they should continue to improve the process. The guidance received by the teachers in charge of the two groups were helping to build their writing competence; although in group two there is less clear evidence of using strategies than in the first group. However, there were very well-written texts in the management of language and vocabulary, but not as to the structure of text as such.’

On the other hand, checking the texts, JA affirms: “these direct tools influence the way students develop their writing. False cognates, for instance, were common in their texts. These words written similarly in Spanish are easily confused, but they refer to another reality; they were used as compensation strategies for developing supporting sentences”.

Concerning the same question, ALM thinks that: “My observations lead me to conclude that direct cognitive strategies need to be strengthened in order to enable students to develop and apply them more effectively in writing. This is justified on the fact that the division of paragraphs in many of the texts revealed the necessity to devote more attention to the selection of main ideas, and secondary ideas that support them. Furthermore, although it is clear that for certain exercises teachers gave students key vocabulary to use in their writings, most students merely transcribe them at the beginning of the task. In fact, the essays do not reveal effective appropriation of the vocabulary suggested by the teachers. I can say that although the revised writings show positive influence of some learning strategies, the effective progress of students in their development of communicative competence in English writing requires a more arduous work with them”.

It can be said that the strategies used by students were helpful, whereas it is necessary to reinforce and enhance the use of them, as well as to provide exercises in



which students have the opportunity to get in touch with other strategies that can be useful for them and give tools to improve the learning and teaching process.

Related to the third question: *Can you suggest three different strategies that you think students did not use and could help them to advance in the process of academic writing in English?* Through the video recorded sessions, some of the strategies were observed on the students, but it is necessary to mention some others which were not used by the students and that are important for the teachers and the same students to know in order to be used or to motivate to use. The comments that the evaluators made about it are as follows: CL states: “In my personal opinion a brainstorming is very productive at the beginning of each written activity, as well as mind-maps or semantic networks with students. I saw this especially with many of the texts of the second group. There were texts where anxiety was reflected in the student products (many corrections, deletions, contradictory ideas, etc.) It is important that students’ pieces of writing are read by other students of the group because it helps to enhance the writing process and allows understanding that one writes in order to be read. That would also reduce anxiety in writing, as being aware of the importance of correcting to make oneself understood.”

Talking about the same aspect, JA declares: “Learning strategies could dramatically help to improve the writing process, as they would allow students to take charge of their production, and address tasks not only as an exercise as a final product, but also as a process in which reflection and constant review provide an opportunity to promote autonomy and therefore success in their learning process”. It is significant to highlight those collaborative and cooperative works which help students to do the task with more confidence; about this, JA claims: “Collaborative and cooperative work provides an opportunity to greatly enhance learning, because such indirect strategy allows students to support their peers for correction and revision of their texts. The affective environment gives students a proper context to address the possible inconvenience and frustration that may be present in the written process”.

One of the ideas that have been repetitive is that of getting students in touch with vocabulary that they probably will use in the composition; respect to this, ALM asserts:

“Doing exercises related to creating concept mapping and putting the suggested vocabulary in context and state the relationship between them and with the written task brings a starting point to construct sentences in which the effective use of vocabulary is present. Mind maps and graphics offer a conceptual alternative for planning and organizing ideas, and even vocabulary selection for those students who find it complex to put thoughts into words primarily in a foreign language”.

As was mentioned in the section about written, during the written process there are some stages that are essential to take into consideration in order to present a final

product according to the parameters that were given. ALM explains: “Planning of written text. Writing and selecting main ideas with proper evaluation of complementary ideas are an important component to ensure the success of writing, regardless the language in which it is written. One way to familiarize students with the importance of this step is to teach it as part of the strategy POWER (Plan, Organize, Write, Edit and Review). (James Madison University)”.

The last question that was answered by the evaluators was: *From the results obtained by students in the writing of the texts, it could be said that there is a relationship among the use and non-use of learning strategies, and success or failure of students in the outcome of their writing process? Explain, please.* The results achieved by students after knowing the assessment showed differences between the groups and the strategies used by students during the written process. About the question, CL comments: “Definitely the relationship between strategies and the achievement of the goal is very close. Keeping in mind that students have a clear idea about the aim, as well as their weaknesses and strengths, it is expected to look for the appropriate strategy to achieve the purpose and to find the path that will lead to it. It means that these experiences are not only viewed as something to make a product, but an exercise in self-awareness regarding the strengths and weaknesses in order to recognize what could be the plan of action that will lead to improve in their skills, in this case, written”.

As for the same question, JA considers that: “The use of learning tools is evident at all levels of language proficiency. Those who got high scores used effectively compensation strategies and memories, but the evidence of the use of these strategies were much higher in the texts of students with lower scores. I would say that according to the evaluated texts, at a lower level of language the higher use of compensation strategies; at a higher language understanding a lower incidence of compensatory strategies”.

Regarding to the question, ALM declares: “The results show a direct relationship between the use of learning strategies and the development of writing skills in a foreign language. When there is more knowledge and effective application of learning strategies, students have more teacher support, and in turn for developing autonomy written tasks”.

## **6. A sample of analysis of results about written texts assessed by evaluators**

Investigation the learning strategies that have been reported and used by foreign language students during the writing process gave valuable results that could be contrasted with the assessment that the evaluators have done, after receiving the composition texts and answering a questionnaire about the issue.

In spite of the main objective is directly associated with learning strategies, it is relevant to mention some samples about the written texts, especially because through the

texts the evaluator could get valuable information not only about the strategies, but also the writing as a skill.

The information that will be presented and analyzed in this section was randomly chosen and belongs to the results provided by the evaluators and was tabulated in order to optimize the analysis of the results of the assessment based on the parameters that were established to do this.

One aspect that was kept in mind was the **task fulfillment**. As for the indicator ‘task fulfillment’, which refers to complete a task given taking into account certain parameters, in the case of this study, the following categories were used: compliance with the requirements of the task (CRT), appropriateness to the subject (AT), quality of ideas (CI), relationship between ideas and theme (RIT), and incorporation of ideas textual (IT). What Professor CL considered is shown in the figures:

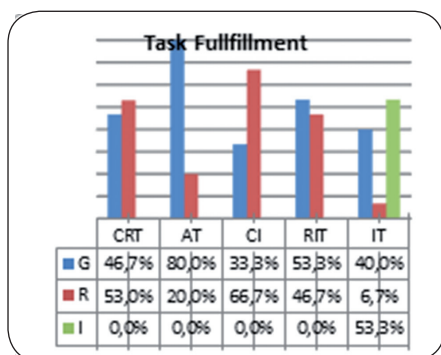


Figure 1. Task fulfillment. Group 1. CL.

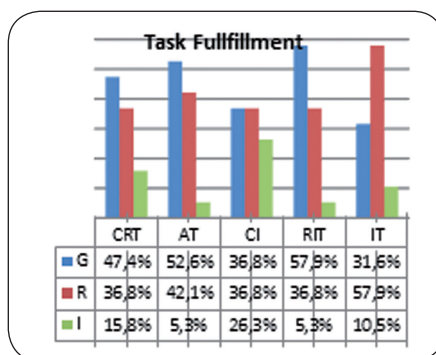


Figure 2. Task fulfillment. Group 2. CL.

Analyzing the figures above, in general it can be said that, finishing an exercise taking into account all the parameters, not always mean that it is well done, as it can be observed in Figure 1 and 2. Comparing the two groups, it can be said that the first group showed more exercises between good and regular and less in terms of insufficient. While group was heterogeneous, that is to say, the compositions were placed in good, regular and insufficient. Concerning to the results, it can be deduced that there are different students’ level between group one and two.

Regarding to ‘**Message Organization**’, that kept in mind the following aspects: organization of ideas (OI), paragraph structure (EP), use of connectors (UC), use of cohesion mechanism (MC), and number of paragraphs (CP), the next Figures show the JA’ results:

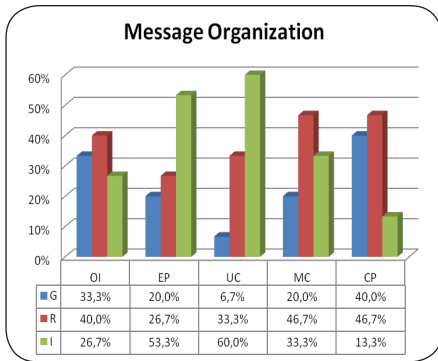


Figure 3. Message organization. Group 1.  
JA.

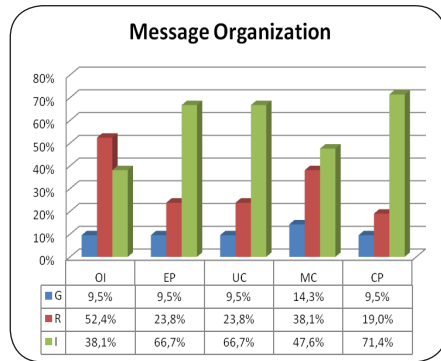


Figure 4. Message organization. Group 2.  
JA.

The evaluation of written composition showed striking differences between both groups, because the group one had high percentages in the good range, compared with group two that reveals quite small percentages in the same range. In reference to regular, the group two showed high percentage. About insufficient, the group two showed high percentage too. While both groups receive the same instruction, it could be detected that some pupils had a better performance, doing tasks in accordance with the requirements, meanwhile other students presented serious difficulties in this aspect that was assessed by the three evaluators.

According to what was observed during the writing process, it could be said that students' level have played an important role in writing composition texts, so that if they did not have a clear idea about how to organize the ideas or message, the difficulties, not only about the text itself but also the use of some appropriate strategies that could be helpful for them, are evident; Chamot *et al.* (1996: 178) assert: "Having access to appropriate strategies should lead students to higher expectations of learning success, a crucial component of motivation. An important aspect in viewing oneself as a successful learner is self-control over strategy use..."

Some categories were taken into account to evaluate **vocabulary**: variety of vocabulary (VV), selection of appropriate vocabulary topic (VAT), adjust the level of the student (ANE), word choice according context (SPC), using new vocabulary (VN), use of paraphrases (P). The results related to the aspect of vocabulary, according to data provided by Professor ALM, point out a significant number of compositions were placed in good, and other striking enough percentage in regularly. It is observed that only a minimal percentage is insufficient assessment, as is shown in the following Figure.

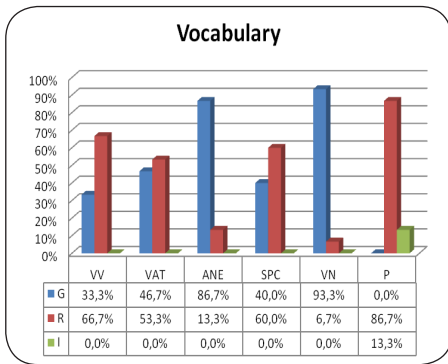


Figure 5. Vocabulary. Group 1. ALM.

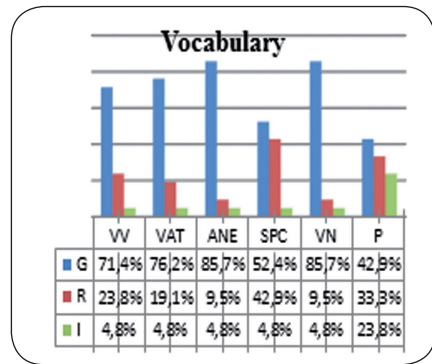


Figure 6. Vocabulary. Group 2. ALM.

It is important to highlight that the same aspects for the other evaluators have shown a big percentage of students on regular and insufficient. Then, vocabulary has played a vital role in written text; for instance: the accuracy, appropriateness, allows to be understood by those who read and as well shows that students have some command of the language that is being used. It should be noted that the use of lexical composition exercises written in a foreign language is sometimes limited because students do not have a clear idea about words or expressions which enable them to present an idea in a comprehensible way. With regard to vocabulary, it is possible to say that the knowledge of a lot of words and expressions greatly helps the student to build an understandable text varied smoothly, contrary to those with little amount of words that are clearly writing limited and many do so repetitively.

**Morphosyntax** was taken into account to assess the writing texts. It is essential to kept in mind this aspect, so it is based on the internal word structure and well-formed sentences, which brings coherence and cohesion. Well-structured sentences (OE), the sentences correct link (ECO), sentence length (LO), a variety of structures use (VEU) were taken into consideration; the results by CL are shown in the next Figure.

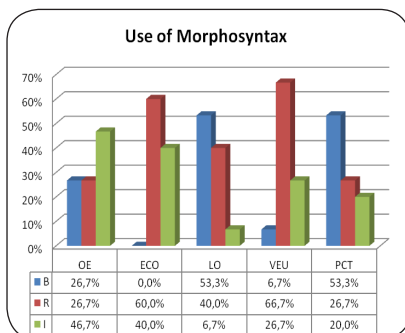


Figure 7. Grupo 1. Use of Morphosyntax. CL.

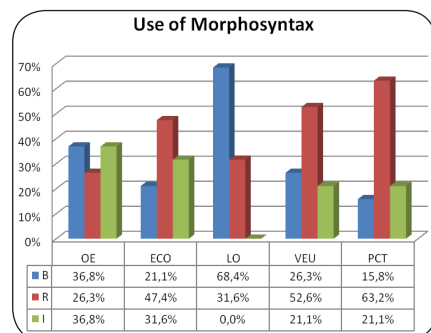


Figure 8. Grupo 2. Use of Morphosyntax. CL.

The above data reveal that group two again got better, otherwise the group one, with higher percentages are placed in regular, few percentages in good and in insufficient. It can conclude that the writings of students in general have a good structure, complete sentences, some of the sentences were well-structured, that is to say a simple sentence structure with the minimum elements: subject, verb and complement. Whereas in minimal cases are observed and identified compound sentences using a topic sentence and secondary sentences. Only in rare cases is the use of exemplification and the use of connectors, and a thread that is taking the reader to the end of the text.

To conclude the analysis, the last of the aspects that were taken into account to assess the writing texts is ‘format, punctuation, spelling and readability’. Correct presentation of the text (PCT), spelling (O), punctuation (P), and readability (L) are usually revised by teachers, perhaps because they are easier to identify when one is reading a document. Moreover, it is very common to observe that during learning and teaching process, especially about writing, these aspects are very familiar for both teachers and students. Then, review is reduced to a simple identification of elements and loses its essence as such.

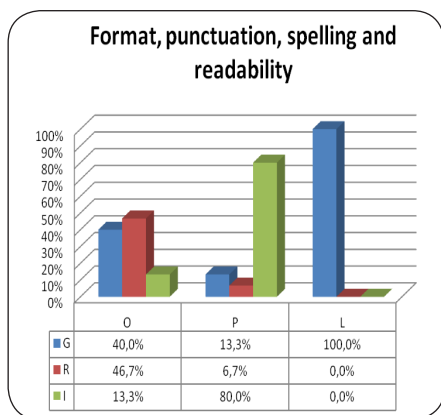


Figura 9. Group 1. Format, punctuation, spelling and readability’.

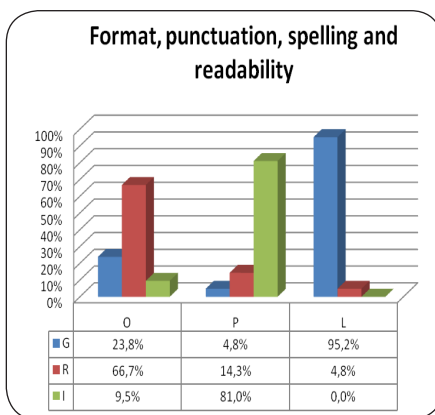


Figura 10. Grupo 2. Format, punctuation, spelling and readability’.

It can be said that the percentages are roughly similar for both groups. In writing compositions, it is very relevant to care writing, punctuation, spelling and readability, so the reader is fostered to know the content of the text because it is well-done in general. The reviewing task plays an important role; so it is not only related with formal aspects but also needs to focus on the writer’s intention, then it is necessary to establish a balance in order to provide appropriate feedback to enhance written process.

## 7. Conclusions

The valuable information provided through research study can contribute to improve not only the use of learning strategies but also the writing process too. The opportunity given to evaluators to propose some learning strategies that can be used by students in order to enrich the writing process was very valuable as it provides tools to teachers as well to students to enhance this productive skill.

Keeping in mind evaluators' conclusions, plan strategies and organization are required by pupils, because they are essential to get a coherent and cohesive text written. If the student has a clear idea about the issue, the objective and aspects that are developed in writing, this makes it easy to carry out the exercise. Also, using simple sentences and connectors to link ideas allows the main idea will be well-developed and supported and the text to be understandable for readers.

The use of some strategies by students from first semester, BA in English, was fruitful and also contributed to recognize what strategies were actually used in their writings, namely the ones that were identified by the evaluators, and really helped students in compositions texts. Students have used some learning strategies during the writing process. However, they need to use more strategies to improve their learning.

It is of great importance to keep in mind that the aim of the research was focused on strategies; however, it is necessary to talk about writing process, which needs to be addressed considering some learning strategies, like: semantic mapping, grouping, linguistic clues, setting goals, organizing, and using checklist, among others.

On the other side, the written itself requires to be exercised during English classes. It is relevant to consider the amount of students per group, especially when the task is to teach and lead students in the writing process, so that it demands, almost, a particular work with each student. Each one needs time to be read and corrected.

Teachers need not only to provide feedback but also to give students the opportunity to write, revise and correct till the final paper is ready. When students have the opportunity to be conscious of the process, they are following up, they do the best.

Students are constantly changing. So, it is possible that the strategies they used before are not the same now. Teachers should be attentive to guide the students in the use of some strategies they do not know in order to improve the learning process.

Furthermore, learning and teaching foreign language is not an easy task. It requires commitment and responsibility to get the best results, especially on students' outcome.

The combination of some strategies shows good results. Teachers should guide their students to profit the students' potentials to adapt, readapt and combine strategies.

This kind of exercise put the students on the way of implementing changes so they learn to be risk takers, and specially do not be afraid to make mistake and start again.

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### Appendix 1 Rubric to correct written texts

DIMENSIONS	INDICATORS	G	R	I
1.Task Fulfillment	Compliance with the requirements of the task			
	Appropriateness to the subject			
	Quality of ideas			
	Relationship between ideas and theme.			
	Incorporation of ideas textual			
2. Message organization	Organization of ideas			
	Paragraph structure			
	Use of connectors			
	Use of cohesion mechanism.			
	Number of paragraphs			
3. Vocabulary	Variety of vocabulary			
	Selection of appropriate vocabulary topic			
	Adjust the level of the student			
	Word choice according context			
	Using new vocabulary			
	Use of paraphrases.			
4. Morpho-syntax	Well-structured sentences			
	The sentences correct link			
	Sentence length			
	A variety of structures use			
5. Format, punctuation, spelling and readability'	Correct presentation of the text			
	Spelling			
	Readability			
	Punctuation			

This is an adaptation rubric from the model of a doctoral thesis whose author is Belkis Cárdenas, keeping too, the external evaluators ideas and our own contributions as researchers.

## Appendix 2

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE EXPERTS IN WRITING

Give a qualitative score to each one of the students' piece or writing, keeping in mind these questions:

- In general terms, which are the learning strategies you see in the student's writings? Underline the strategies you consider are so evident in the box below. a. Direct strategies, b. Indirect.

DIRECT STRATEGIES		INDIRECT STRATEGIES			
Memory	cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
They help the students to store and recover new information. Example: group, relate old with new information, contextualize, associate with images, use key words, design or use conceptual maps, revise and use structures.	They imply the direct manipulation of the learning material. Example: use structures, models; practice, identify and write main ideas; use different resources; analyze and think carefully; use rules, translate, transfer, create structures, take notes, summarize and underline.	They help the students to understand or produce messages in the FL in spite of the limitations of the knowledge they have about the language. Examples: to guess the meaning using linguistic or extra linguistic keys; ask for help, select the topic, change or adjust the message according to what they know; create words, use synonyms, periphrases or circumloquios.	They involve the planning and reflection about the learning process; monitoring and evaluation of his/her own progress. Examples: Associate what they know with what they do not know; focus their attention, order and plan the learning; identify the purpose of each one of the tasks; plan the necessary to each task; look for opportunities to practice.	They help the students to regulate the emotions and attitudes. Examples: Reduce their anxiety by means of the use of the music, the laugh. To be positive; answer the questions without fear.	They contribute to the learning process through de interaction with others. Examples: Ask for clarifications or checking; ask for help; have empathy with their partners and the teacher.

Taking from: System of learning strategies classification, R. Oxford (1990)

2. According to the answers given previously, do you consider that the strategies used by the students have helped them in the development of their writing tasks? Give reasons?


3. Suggest three different strategies that were not used by the students in their writing task, and that could help them to improve the English writing process.


4. Keeping in mind the scores got by the students in their writing tasks, do you think that there is a relationship between the use/not use of the learning strategies, and the students' progress or difficulties in the process or writing? Explain.

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#### Referencia

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